

Weed Awareness



Prepared by
Weed Control Authority
Lancaster County



The County Commissioners serve as the Lancaster County Weed Control Authority. Russell Shultz serves as the superintendent and supervises a seasonal staff of six weed inspectors with the assistance of Chief Inspector Barb Frazier and Linda Spilker, Account Clerk.

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Weed Control is Everyone's Business



Noxious weeds impact the economic and environmental well being of the community. Overgrown weeds in the City of Lincoln contribute to

health problems and the aesthetics and overall appearance of the City. Landowners need to be aware of their noxious weed control and weed abatement responsibilities. Others need to understand the importance of a strong weed program and provide public support.

Almost every ownership parcel outside of developed residential lots has or had one or more kinds of noxious weeds present. The key to noxious weed control is not allowing the plants to seed. This requires persistence and follow-up. Most of the public and private landowners understand this and are keeping their noxious weeds under control.

It is the job of noxious weed control authority staff to make landowners aware and to assist in the job of controlling noxious weeds. Many landowners are accomplishing control without any assistance or contact from the authority. The authority carries out a strong information and awareness program along with an extensive inspection program to encourage voluntary compliance of the Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act.

The authority has also provided the inspection and administration of the City of Lincoln's weed abatement program since entering into an inter-local agreement with the City in 1996. Weed abatement is a part of the Health and Safety Chapter of the City Code dealing with uncontrolled or uncultivated growth of weeds, brush, vines, grasses or other vegetation which offer vector or rodent harborage, contribute noxious pollens to the atmosphere or unreasonably interfere with the use and enjoyment of abutting public or private property.

The measure of a successful weed control program is the acceptance and voluntary compliance of the landowners. There continues to be a high level of voluntary compliance with the Noxious Weed Control Act and the City of Lincoln's Weed Abatement Ordinance. This voluntary compliance was obtained with a decreased number of legal notifications.

Following is the Lancaster County Weed Control Authority's 2004 Annual Report.

—Russell Shultz
Superintendent

2004 Annual Report

A noxious weed control plan was developed that guided the operations of the Weed Control Authority for the year. This plan was approved and supported by the Weed Control Authority. A summary of these activities follows.

Inspection Activity

There were 6,592 inspections made of 3,029 sites on 20,829 acres during the year. We found 2,498 violations on 5,900 acres. Violations dropped 280 from last year.

Lancaster County Noxious Weed Control Program

We found 1,067 infestations on 4,986 acres. The number of infestations found decreased by 119 and acres decreased by 1,708. There were 122 more purple loosestrife infestations found. The number of infestations found by noxious weed is shown below. Of these sites, 882 were controlled by landowners. The Authority controlled 30 sites on 112 acres.

City of Lincoln Weed Abatement Program

We found 1,431 violations as a result of 1,681 complaints. This was 161 less violations and 239 less complaints than in 2004. Voluntary compliance of landowners remained at 93 percent. Forced cutting had to be performed on 109 sites at the cost of \$11,817. Of these, 88 sites had to be specially assessed for \$14,218.

Expanded Cooperation Efforts

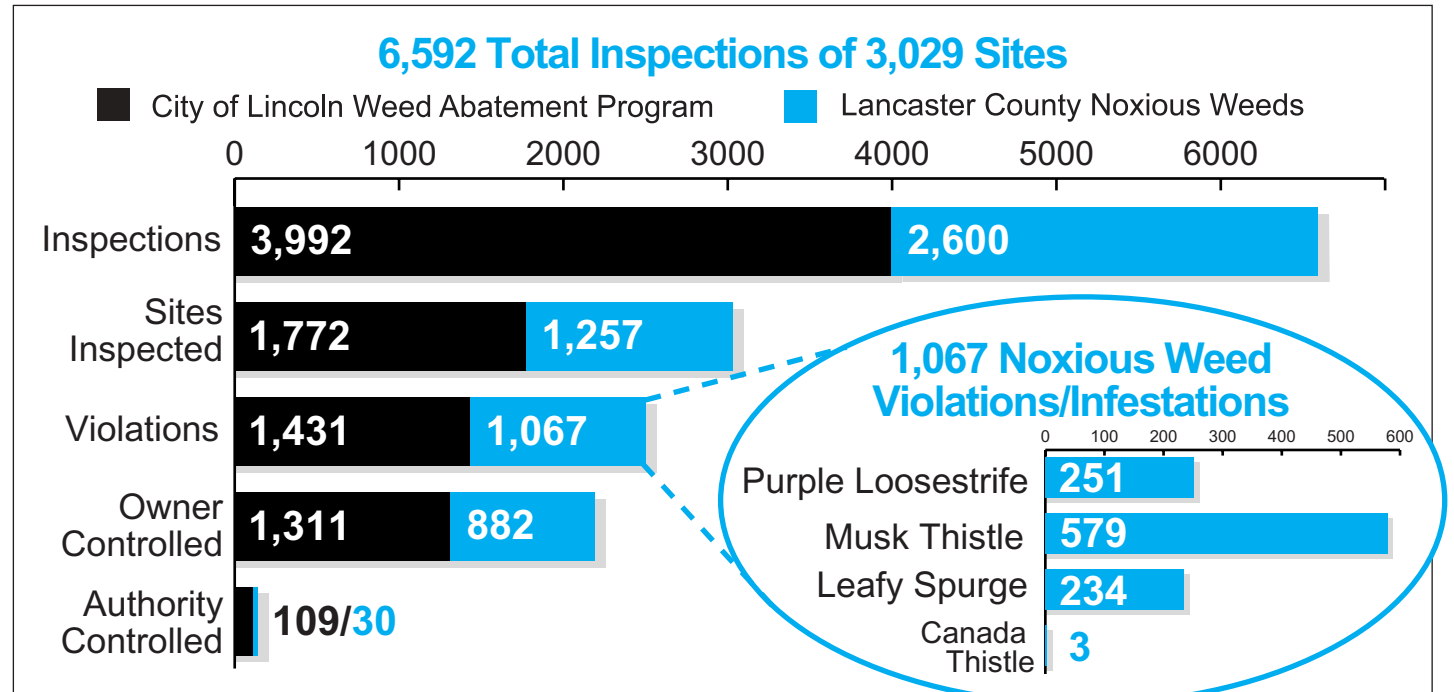
The Lancaster County Weed Control Authority joined with ten other counties in eastern Nebraska and other partners in forming the Lower Platte Weed Management Area to address the eight noxious weeds and other invading weeds. The first target effort is three weeds invading riparian areas along the Platte River and upstream. These three weeds are purple loosestrife, phragmites and salt cedar.

Prevention Activities

Inspectors were trained to be alert to noxious weeds and potential noxious weeds. We made 15 weed-free forage inspections and certified as being noxious-weed free. This included Nebraska Game and Park's hay fields, straw that was going to be used for mulch on state roads and hay that was being transported for use to feed horses on a hunting trip.

Awareness Activities

A Weed Awareness insert was published in the February issue of the Lancaster County Extension NEBLINE newsletter. The Authority Web site was maintained and updated. There were 40,814 hits, an increase of almost 14,000 hits from the previous year. Around 400 informational mailings were made to landowners in addition to the 2,500 violation notifications. An exhibit was displayed at the state fair and other locations.

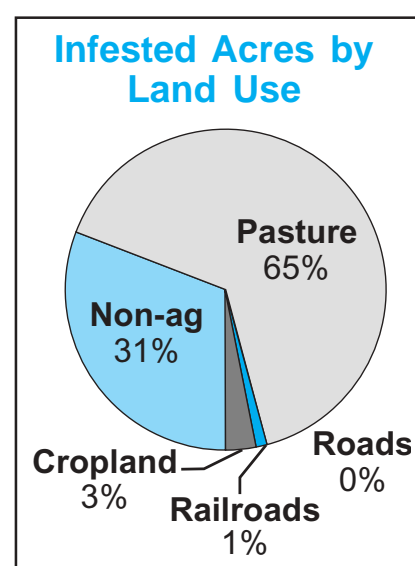


Extent of Noxious Weeds in Lancaster County

Noxious weed acres in the county had been on a declining trend from 1993 to 2001. The major reason for this decline was the result of the control efforts of both public and private landowners. Weather conditions are also a factor such as 2000, 2001, 2003 and 2004. It was dry in the fall and spring of 2000 and 2001 when most of the musk thistle germinates. Moisture conditions were good in the fall and spring of 2003 and 2004 resulting in more noxious weeds germinating from the persistent seed bank in the soil and making control more difficult.

Control efforts of landowners have remained strong during this period. The infestations on roadsides and railroads have been on a steady decline. Less than five percent of the infestations have been allowed to go to seed. There are many seeds dormant in the soil and will germinate when conditions are right. The key to long term control is to prevent seeding that will add to the seed bank.

All land uses have infestations of noxious weeds. Approximately 13.5 percent of the pastureland acres are infested. Non-ag land, which includes the City of Lincoln and rural lots, is second in the amount of noxious weed infestations with over six percent of the acres infested. Cropland infestations are found mostly in alfalfa fields and idle cropland. The most visible infestations are on roadsides and railroads. Yet they have less than one percent of the total infested acres. There has been an aggressive control effort on these transportation corridors resulting in a sharp drop in the acres



infested. About four percent of the land area is infested with noxious weeds. Musk thistle makes up 94 percent of the noxious weed infested area. Musk thistle has been found in almost all the sections in the county. Leafy Spurge does not cover a lot of acres, but it has been found on over 400 sites and in one out of seven sections.

Plumeless Thistle and Canada Thistle are about one percent of the infestations each. There are a significant number of purple loosestrife infestations but they make up only 15 acres, a very small part of the total infested acres.